



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Faculty of Medicine,
Dentistry and
Health Sciences

MISCH *Hub*

Methods and Implementation Support
for Clinical and Health Research

Health Economics *Node*

Decision makers are faced with the challenge of meeting the increasing demand for health care services given constrained funds. Economic evaluation has been widely used to inform decisions about which health care interventions to fund from available resources. It involves comparison of alternative interventions, treatments, or programs in terms of their costs and consequences.

In Australia, the uptake of a new treatment depends on the government's decision to provide subsidies via programs such as the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). For a new drug or device to be listed on the PBS or MBS, economic evaluation is required to determine whether it represents value for money. The Health Economics Node offers support with all aspects of economic evaluation to clinical and health researchers affiliated with the University of Melbourne.

What does this node offer?

Our MISCH health economists can provide support throughout the whole research process, from design to completion and translation:

Design stage - It is important to seek input from a health economist early in the design of a study to determine the type of analysis (cost analysis, health outcome analysis, cost-consequence analysis, cost-minimisation analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, cost-utility analysis or cost-benefit analysis), the data to be collected, the methods for data collection, the methods for data analyses, the plan for a stand-alone publication of the health economic study, and input for the grant application or study protocol.

Execution stage - The health economists offer support and facilitate data collection, design of an electronic system to store the data, liaising with governmental organization for data linkage, checking the collected data, interim analyses of costs and health outcomes, and design of conceptual decision analytic models including both cohort and patient-level models.

Completion stage - The health economists offer support for data analyses, extrapolation of the trial results, development of computer models including decision trees, Markov models and patient-level simulation models, sensitivity analyses, uncertainty analyses, and writing of health economic manuscripts for publication.

Translational stage - The health economists offer support for interpretation and effective communication of research findings via national/international conferences, media, scientific journals, seminars, workshops, websites of relevant stakeholders and web applications.

Frequently Asked Questions

What can I expect from my Health Economics consultation?

During your initial consultation, a member of our Health Economics node will work with you to identify the health economics support required for the aims of your study. We ask about the intended health economic outputs required for your research study, the health outcomes, your timelines and your budget for the health economics study. We will then complete an agreement outlining our involvement, which we will ask you to sign.

Can I just be trained to do the Health Economics costings/analysis myself?

We do offer a range of short courses in health economics, from one-day introductory level courses to three-day practical courses in economic evaluation. From time to time, we also offer free webinars on the principles of health economic study design. We recommend, however, that the economic evaluation be performed by a trained health economist, given the difficulties associated with extrapolation, decision analytic modelling, uncertainty analyses, measuring indirect costs (such as productivity losses and unpaid work), translating health outcomes into QALYs or monetary values, and developing complex simulation models.

Why do we name one of the MISCH members as a CI instead of AI?

The main reason MISCH members should be included as a CI is because we are able to make a sufficient contribution to the development of the grant application and ensure the implementation of the health economic study to a high standard. In addition, including a MISCH health economist as a CI ensures embedding this expert within the team so they have equal status to other team members – some team members are still building their careers just like you and this supports their career development and engagement in research activities. Like current approaches to embed a MISCH biostatistician within your team, the health economic expertise represents a unique skill set. As an investigator, the health economist will critically review the grant application, including health economics methodology and data requirements, and draft the sections on health economic outcomes and analysis plan.

Do I have to name a MISCH health economist on the research team as a CI?

No, you do not have to engage a member of our team as a CI if we don't make a sufficient contribution to warrant the inclusion as a CI, or the health economists are not eligible to be a CI according to the funding rules. We recommend a MISCH health economist to be named as a CI or AI only when there is mutual benefit and alignment with the project.

Why do I need to include a budget in my grant application for Health Economics support?

As health economics requires specialist expertise, we recommend budgeting this within your grant proposal. The cost is needed to cover the time we spend on providing input for protocol development, design of data collection and linkage, analysis of costs and health outcomes, conducting trial-based and possibly model-based economic evaluation, and importantly, leading the writing of a manuscript for publication.

Do MISCH have to be included as co-author/s?

Where intellectual contributions are made by MISCH experts, co-authorship follows the University of Melbourne publication policy (MPF1181). Depending on the contributions to a project, MISCH experts may be considered collaborators at the same level as other academic colleagues who contribute intellectually and receive funding for work on a project

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